

DEMIAN DINÉYAZHI'

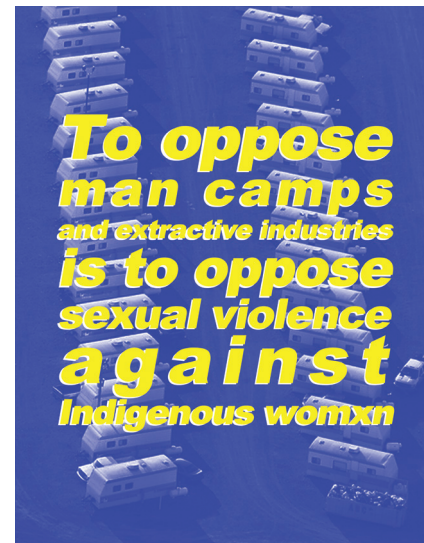




Trust Fall (Pine Ridge), 2012  
Photograph



Demian DinéYazhi' and R.I.S.E.: *Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment*  
*A Nation Is a Massacre*, 2019  
Installation view  
Print  
Dimensions variable  
Photo: Mario Galluci



Demian DinéYazhi' and R.I.S.E.: *Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment*  
*A Nation Is a Massacre*, 2019  
Installation view  
Print  
Dimensions variable  
Photo: Mario Galluci



Demian DinéYazhi' and R.I.S.E.: *Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment*  
*A Nation Is a Massacre*, 2019  
Installation view  
Print  
Dimensions variable  
Photo: Mario Galluci

*Previous page*  
*my ancestors will not let me forget this*, 2019  
Installation view  
Glass, neon, aluminum frame  
41¾ x 22 x 22¼ in  
Photo: Justen Waterhouse

## RADICAL DIAGNOSTICS

by Ashley Stull Meyers

There are certain timely moments when the best way to fix something is to break it—when the only way forward is an altogether new path. The gesture of breaking, frenetic and passionate, is not necessarily an act of disordering. Instead, it can play out akin to a poetic repositioning—a scattering, a thoughtful deconstruction, the most incisive of fractures. Demian DinéYazhi' (Diné) is an artist deeply invested in the sort of radicality many others don't dare imagine. Their work, steeped in the ever-expanding genre of "Radical Indigenous Queer Feminist Art," is at once a nod to peoples and practices long neglected by a white, heteronormative canon, and a contemporary forebearer for a way of making that first scolds us about what needs to be unmade.

DinéYazhi's practice defies categorization in many ways. Its performativity is only strengthened by its attention to sculpture and print. Its teasing and coaxing toward art historical references from the 1960s and 1990s is both masterful institutional critique and the best of what those movements left incomplete. Their 2019 performance in collaboration with Kevin Holden, titled *SHATTER*, functioned as a disruption to celebrated narratives involving the Indigenous body and its various misrepresentations. Through a guttural enactment of pain, grief, and dissatisfaction, the duo irreparably destroyed a number of offensive pop-cultural tokens—red-skinned ceramics, white-washed representations of *Peter Pan's* princess Tiger Lily, and DVD copies of the film, *Indian in the Cupboard*. The performance's soundtrack, a chopped and screwed version of the *Ballad of Davy Crockett*, is punctuated by the drone-like wailing of a live, improvised guitar riff. These anti-melodic sounds are a bodily exercise in stream-of-consciousness as an anti-colonialist gesture. The shattered remnants of mistakenly loved Disney figurines, and the remixing in tone of a long-held western folktale, function as surgical social interruptions. DinéYazhi' and Holden refuse assimilation—their movements are delicate in their conception but meaningfully coarse in their execution.

DinéYazhi' spares no corner of their studio for the exploration of ever-urgent injustices in the Indigenous community. Their ongoing series, *A Nation is a Massacre*, makes increasingly transparent a lengthy history of violence, murder, and dishonorable politics toward a previously

flourishing Native population. The project includes poster-like prints, nodding to the legacy of agitprop, that advocate for the lives of innumerable missing and murdered Indigenous women. They remember, fiercely and boldly, the names of gender-variant community members lost to institutionalized indignities. The work proclaims, through site-specific vinyl text on windows, that the scenic overlooks we enjoy are stolen. We are reminded that, "Oregon was founded by incalculable attempts by settlers to exterminate Indigenous peoples." While another variation scolds, "You are a product of Indigenous genocide and environmental racism." But DinéYazhi's production doesn't gather steam with crime and punishment in mind. Their work aims, first and foremost, to make plain what history has defensively obscured. The calculated marginalizations these works detail are too seldom explained as tied to their indisputably cruel results. The peoples who once stewarded North American land, and called it by another name, have had their existence forever changed and maliciously challenged. Through work that manifests language with a passion that's difficult to convey in other forms, DinéYazhi's works call to the fore state-sanctioned violence and exclusionary policy as cause to lost generations of makers and irreplaceable voices. Though these mimicked versions of headlining broadcasts cannot operate as a remedy, they settle instead for being a beacon of resistance. They eschew formalist aesthetics for the truth.

The work of a contemporary artist is often that of performing a radical diagnostic—to keenly and effectively observe, call out, and at their best, help imagine an alternative. The arts have the latitude to reach further and more freely than the compacted duties of many other professional thinkers. Where politicians are bound to their complicated constituencies, and doctors to their neatly defined rubrics of care, artists can be community builders and healers of a whole other breed. They can diagnose the diseases that imperil the best of human connection—heteronormativity as exemplar, unchecked capitalism, racial bias—and light the path to modes of being that don't simply modify pre-existing frameworks, but reimagine them altogether. Their strategies toward a radical diagnostic begin with a shattering.

Demian DinéYazhi' is a guardian of Indigenous legacy. Their work, communal as much as material, is a gathering site for survival and empowerment.



*[500 years]*, 2018  
Installation view



Demian DinéYazhi' and Noelle Sosaya  
*Untitled (Sovereignty)*, 2017  
Installation view  
Textile  
84 x 132 in  
Photo: Evan La Londe

## DEMIAN DINÉYAZHI' (Indigenous Diné)

*b. 1983. Lives and works in Portland, Oregon*

*2018 Hallie Ford Fellow*

Demian DinéYazhi' is a transdisciplinary artist who uses social interventions to interrupt colonial power structures. They grew up in Gallup, New Mexico, and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Intermedia Arts from Pacific Northwest College of Art in 2014. DinéYazhi' received the Henry Art Museum, Seattle, Washington Brink Award and exhibition in 2017, and many institutions internationally have presented their work alone, and through the initiative Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment (R.I.S.E.) founded by DinéYazhi'. Notable exhibitions include the Whitney Museum of American Art, Pioneer Works, Smack Mellon, Artists Space, and CANADA Gallery in New York, New York; the Portland Art Museum, Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery and Portland2109 Biennial, Disjecta Contemporary Art Center in Portland, Oregon; Southern Exposure, San Francisco, California; and the 22nd Biennale of Sydney, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Campbelltown, Australia.

**Hallie Brown** was born in 1905, outside of Tulsa, in Indian Territory that would become the state of Oklahoma. She supported herself as she earned a bachelor's degree at East Central University and taught in Oklahoma before her parents moved their family to rural Oregon. In 1935 Hallie married Kenneth W. Ford and together they established Roseburg Lumber Company in the midst of the Great Depression.

Hallie Ford was drawn to art all her life, specifically the accessibility of artmaking. She took classes with the painter Carl Hall at Willamette University in Salem, and painting became a central part of her life. Her philanthropy established and supported key Oregon visual art museums and universities.

After Hallie's death in 2007, The Ford Family Foundation's Board of Directors honored our co-founder by establishing a Visual Arts Program. The first element of this program was the Hallie Ford Fellowships in the Visual Arts, awarded since 2010. Through these unrestricted fellowships, we seek to make significant awards to visual artists who have worked to establish their voice and craft.

Another of our goals is to help support the ecology that builds connections and capacity in the visual arts community of our state. As the Fellows become the focus of exhibitions throughout the world, they bring more attention and support to their Oregon peers. We are certain that Hallie Ford would be pleased to see how both individual artists and the visual arts community in Oregon have flourished since the establishment of this program in her honor.

We could not be more excited each year to bring new Hallie Ford Fellows into this family, and to share their work with you.

*Anne C. Kubisch*  
*President, The Ford Family Foundation*

The Hallie Ford Fellowships are the flagship element of The Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Program. The Foundation commits to an ongoing relationship with our Fellows through exhibition support, convenings, and professional development opportunities. In addition, the Visual Arts Program offers grants to visual artists for unanticipated career opportunities; supports artists-in-residence programs in Oregon and nationally; brings curators and arts writers from outside the region to Oregon for studio visits and community dialogue; commissions arts writing and publication; supports exhibitions, catalogues and other forms of documentation for Oregon artists; and awards grants to enhance exhibition spaces.

The Foundation is pleased to partner with the Oregon Arts Commission, University of Oregon, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), Portland State University, Reed College, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Creative Capital, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, United States Artists, and the artists and visual arts organizations of our state.

The Ford Family Foundation was established in 1957 by Kenneth W. and Hallie E. Ford. Its mission is "successful citizens and vital rural communities" in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The Foundation is located in Roseburg, Oregon, with a Scholarship office in Eugene. For more information about the Foundation and its Visual Arts Program, visit [www.tfff.org](http://www.tfff.org).



© 2020

Published by The Ford Family Foundation,  
Roseburg, OR

All rights reserved. This book may not  
be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any  
form without written permission from  
the publisher.

Essay © 2020 by Ashley Stull Meyers

Designed by Martha Lewis

Photographed as credited

Edited by Abby McGehee

Printed and finished in Portland, OR,  
by Brown Printing

*A Nation Is a Massacre*: Courtesy Disjecta  
Contemporary Art Center, Portland, OR

*[500 Years]*: Courtesy Henry Art Gallery,  
Seattle, WA

*my ancestors will not let me forget this*:  
Courtesy the Honolulu Biennial Foundation,  
Honolulu, HI

*Trust Fall (Pine Ridge)*: Courtesy the artist

*Untitled (Sovereignty)*: Courtesy Douglas F.  
Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College,  
Portland, OR